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AUTHOR	Grosset, Jane; DiIenno, Michael
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ABSTRACT

Highlights some findings from the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges database, including student demographics, student persistence at the community colleges, educational objectives of students, and transfer and employment activities of community college graduates. Compares the fall 1998 student body profiles, student attrition, and accomplished objectives and importance of community colleges at the Community College of Philadelphia with statewide data. Finds several factors that may explain, in part, the decline in graduation rates at the college. The strong regional economy may be providing students with good employment opportunities that do not require the completion of a degree program. The decline in graduation rates may also be reflective of early transfer decisions by students. If so, future graduation rates can be expected to increase with the inception of new core-to-core and dual admission agreements. The decrease in the rate at which part-time students leave the college shortly after initial enrollment is encouraging. While the attrition rate for recent part-time students decreased slightly from previous years, the rates of attrition for full-time students have increased slightly. The transfer rates for recent graduates of the college slightly exceeded those of graduates from other Pennsylvania community colleges while the employment outcomes for Philadelphia graduates are comparable to other community college graduates in the Philadelphia region. (VWC)

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A Comparison of Community College of Philadelphia Student Outcomes With The Outcomes of Other Pennsylvania Community College Students

Jane Grosset

Michael DiIenno

Summer 2000

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Introduction

The Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges collects data annually from Pennsylvania community colleges and publishes this information in a report titled *Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges Statewide Database*. The report contains a wide range of information including enrollment trends, revenue and expenditure patterns, and student outcomes for Pennsylvania community colleges. This Institutional Research Report highlights some findings from the statewide database, including student body demographics, student persistence at the community colleges, educational objectives of students, and transfer and employment activities of community college graduates.

Fall 1998 Student Body Profiles

Students enrolled at Community College of Philadelphia resembled their Pennsylvania peers in terms of gender (Figure 1) and age (Figure 2). Except for Allegheny Community College, female students were predominant on most community college campuses. This was especially true for Community College of Philadelphia. Approximately, one-third of fall 1998 community college students, including those at the Community College of Philadelphia, were under the age of 22 and about another third were between 22 and 34 years old. A distinguishing student body characteristic that sets Community College of Philadelphia apart from the student bodies at other Pennsylvania community colleges is minority enrollments. There were larger numbers and percentages of minority students at the College (Figure 3).

The average number of credits taken by full-time students enrolled during recent fall semesters has been stable at approximately 12.6 credits (Figure 4). Compared with their Pennsylvania peers, full-time students at the College enrolled in slightly fewer credits. On the other hand, the average number of credits taken by part-time CCP students has steadily increased over time (Figure 5). Fall 1998 part-time students took an average of 5.9 credits compared to an average of 5.7 credits taken by part-time students in fall 1994. Part-time student credit loads have been higher at the College than at other Pennsylvania community colleges.

Student Attrition

First Year Attrition

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Short-term attrition measures are presented in Figure 6 (full-time students) and Figure 7 (part-time students). New full-time students in fall 1995 through 1997 were tracked to determine the percentage of each group no longer enrolled at the College during subsequent fall semesters. The proportion of fall 1997 students who left within a year of initial enrollment (23.9%) increased slightly from the preceding fall but remained lower than the rate of attrition associated with fall 1995 students (30.6%). The full-time student attrition rate for the College is comparable to those at other Pennsylvania community colleges.

Part-time students were twice as likely as full-time students to drop from the College within their first year (Figure 7). The dropout rate for fall 1997 part-time students decreased from previous falls to 46.8%. The

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College's part-time student attrition rates were among the lowest for part-time students enrolled at Pennsylvania community colleges.

Graduation Rate and Credit Hour Accumulation Patterns

Long-term indicators of student persistence are also available from the statewide database. These persistence indicators include graduation rates and cumulative credits earned after a five-year period. The graduation rates, which are based on the progress of students who entered community colleges for the first time during the 1991-92, 1992-93 or 1993-94 academic years, are presented separately for full-time (Figure 8) and part-time (Figure 9) students.

The graduation rates for full-time students at the College have trended downward from 14.1% to 9.8%. Community College of Philadelphia full-time student graduation rates were half as large as the rates for other full-time Pennsylvania community college students. Part-time student graduation rates at the College paralleled those for full-time students. Part-time student rates have dropped over time and are lower than the rates for part-time students at other Pennsylvania community colleges.

The average cumulative credit information in Figures 10 and 11 indicates that 1993-1994 full-time students persisted to slightly greater levels than their 1992-1993 counterparts. The same was true for part-time students at the College. Compared with other 1993-1994 Pennsylvania community college students, those at the College were less likely to have earned more than 14 credits by the end of their fifth year (Figure 12). The credit hour accumulation of part-time students was fairly similar across Pennsylvania community colleges (Figure 13).

Accomplished Objectives and Importance of Community Colleges

Accomplishment of Educational Objectives

Pennsylvania community college graduates in 1997-1998 were asked, ADid you accomplish the objectives you set for yourself at college?" The distribution of responses to this question, which appear in Figure 14, is fairly consistent across community colleges. Sixty-nine percent of the College's 1998 graduates fully completed their educational goals and another 29% partially completed their goals.

The Importance of Community Colleges to 1997-1998 Graduates

Graduates from 1997-1998 were also asked two related questions concerning the importance of community colleges to the economic well being of the local service area. The first of the questions asked, Did you enroll at the community college because of actual or potential job loss? (Figure 15). In general, graduates of community colleges located in urban settings were more likely than their suburban counterparts to answer this question in the affirmative. Over half of the College's graduates enrolled for this reason.

A second question asked graduates, AIf the community college were not available, would you have been able to attend college?" (Figure 15). Forty-two percent of 1998 Community College of Philadelphia graduates indicated they would have been unable to participate in higher education if the educational opportunities provided by the College were not available.

Transfer Rates

In addition to gathering information about the persistence of community college students and the importance of community colleges as an access point to higher education, the statewide database contained the transfer and employment rates of 1997-1998 community college graduates. Nine months after commencement graduates were asked, AHave you enrolled in another school since leaving the community college?"

Community College of Philadelphia graduates were more likely to have continued their education (48.1%) than graduates of the other Pennsylvania community colleges (Figure 16).

A second question focused on the employment status of graduates nine months after graduation. The question asked graduates whether they were: Employed in a position related to their education, Employed in a position unrelated to their education, Unemployed, or Unavailable for work. These results are presented in Figure 17 for those graduates who did not transfer. Overall, graduates of the College were a little more likely to be working in an unrelated job and more likely to be unavailable for employment than their peers at other community colleges in the region. Unemployment rates were comparable for community colleges in the Philadelphia area.

Summary

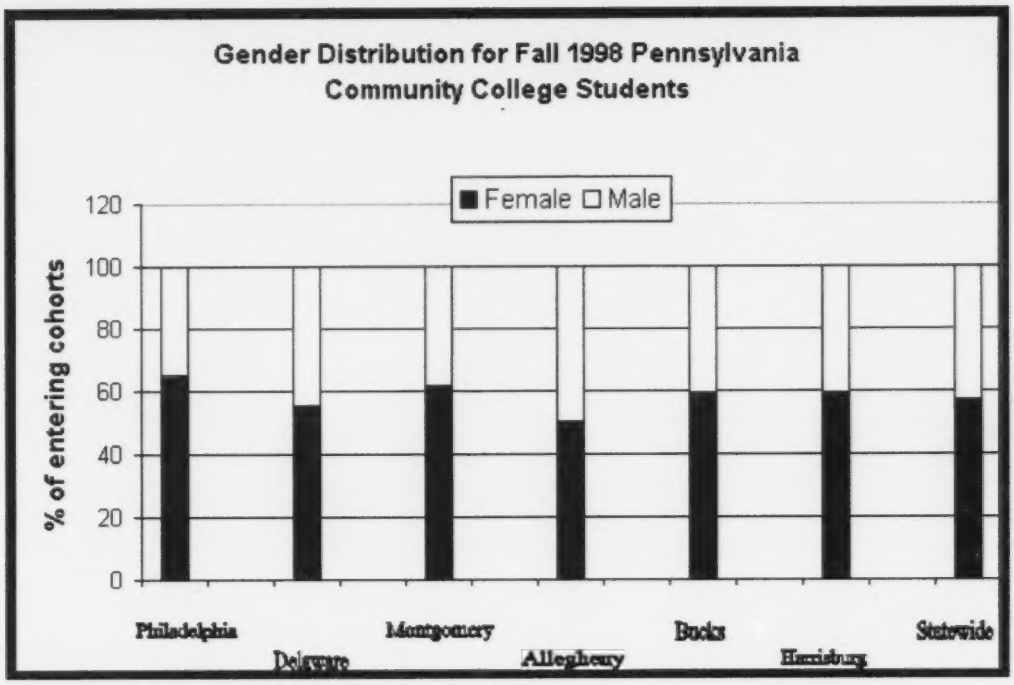
The diverse educational objectives held by community college students need to be considered when analyzing community college attrition rates. Many students enroll at community colleges with the intention of taking several courses and are uninterested in earning an Associates degree or certificate. This understanding helps to put the high rates of community college attrition and the consequent low graduation rates in perspective. Despite this caveat, the relatively low graduation rates at the college and their decline over time should be cause for concern. Upon reflection, several factors may explain, in part, the decline in graduation rates at the College. The strong regional economy of late may be providing students with good employment opportunities that do not require the completion of a degree program. This opportunity to enter the workforce as soon as possible may be particularly attractive to economically disadvantaged students who typically comprise a large proportion of urban community college student bodies. The decline in graduation rates may also be reflective of early transfer decisions by students. If so, future graduation rates can be expected to increase with the inception of new core-to-core and dual admission agreements.

The decrease in the rate at which recent part-time students leave the College shortly after initial enrollment is encouraging. This decrease coincides with several recent institutional efforts which may, in part, account for increases in student persistence. Included among these are programmatic reforms, such as the replacement of the General Studies curriculum with Culture, Science and Technology and Liberal Studies; dual partnerships with universities, such as the Blue and Gold; and expanded orientation opportunities for new students. While the attrition rate for recent part-time students decreased slightly from previous years, the rates of attrition for full-time students have increased slightly.

Community colleges in Pennsylvania serve as important entry points to higher education and resources for workforce development. In Philadelphia, half of recent graduates enrolled at the College because of actual or potential job loss and nearly as many graduates would have been unable to participate in higher education if the College were not available to them.

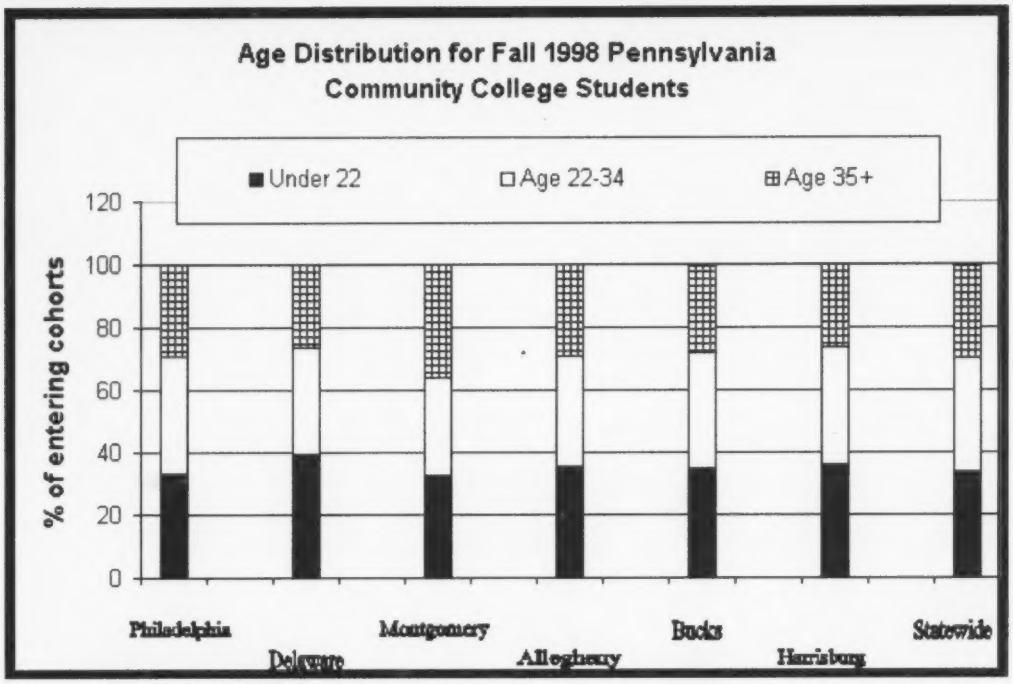
The transfer rates for recent graduates of Community College of Philadelphia slightly exceeded those of graduates from other Pennsylvania community colleges while the employment outcomes for Philadelphia graduates are comparable to other community college graduates in the Philadelphia region.

Figure 1



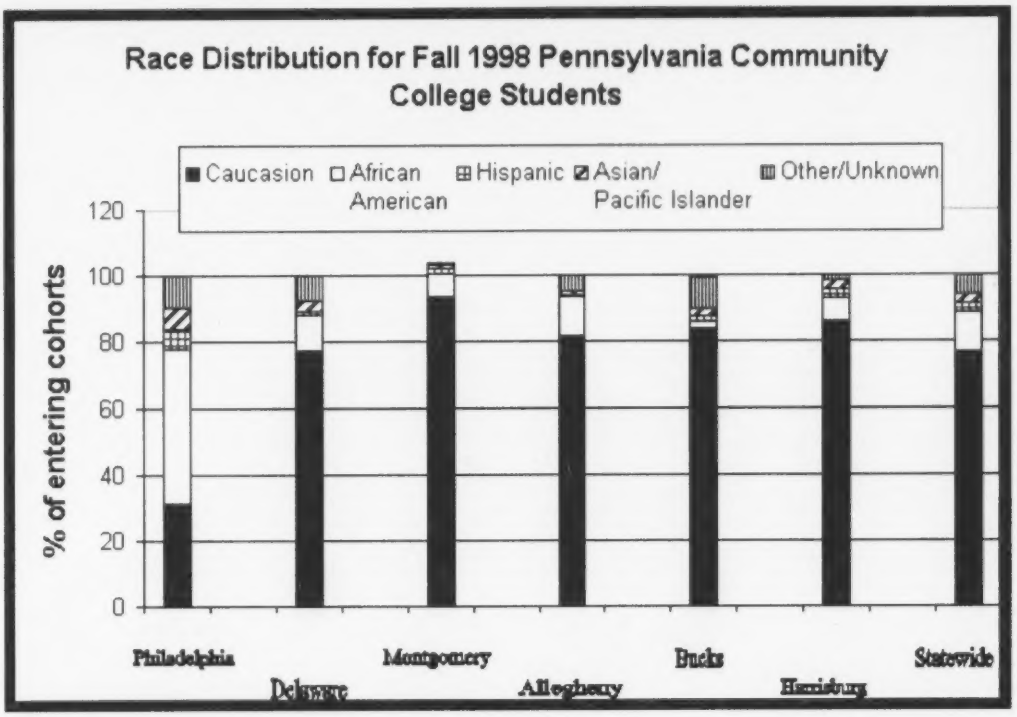
	Female	Male
Philadelphia	65.1	34.9
Delaware	55.4	44.6
Montgomery	61.9	38.1
Allegheny	50.3	49.7
Bucks	59.5	40.5
Harrisburg	59.3	40.7
Statewide	57	43

Figure 2



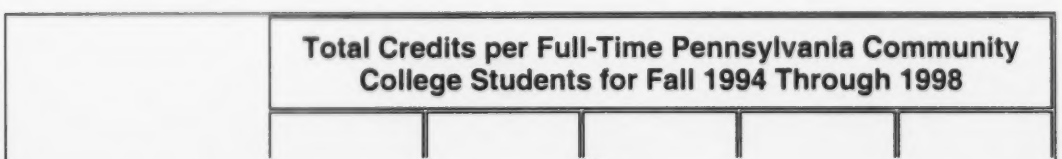
	Under 22	Age 22-34	Age 35+
Philadelphia	33.4	37.5	29.1
Delaware	39.5	34.3	26.2
Montgomery	32.4	31.4	36.2
Allegheny	35.5	35.6	28.9
Bucks	34.9	37.1	27.5
Harrisburg	35.8	37.8	26.6
Statewide	33.9	36.6	29.2

Figure 3



	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Other/ Unknown
Philadelphia	31.6	46.1	6.1	6.4	9.6
Delaware	77.5	10.6	1	3.2	7.6
Montgomery	93.5	7.3	1.6	1	0.3
Allegheny	81.4	12	0.4	1.6	4.6
Bucks	83.9	2.2	1.5	2.1	9.9
Harrisburg	86.1	7	2.5	2.9	1.5
Statewide	76.8	12.1	2.4	2.8	5.7

Figure 4

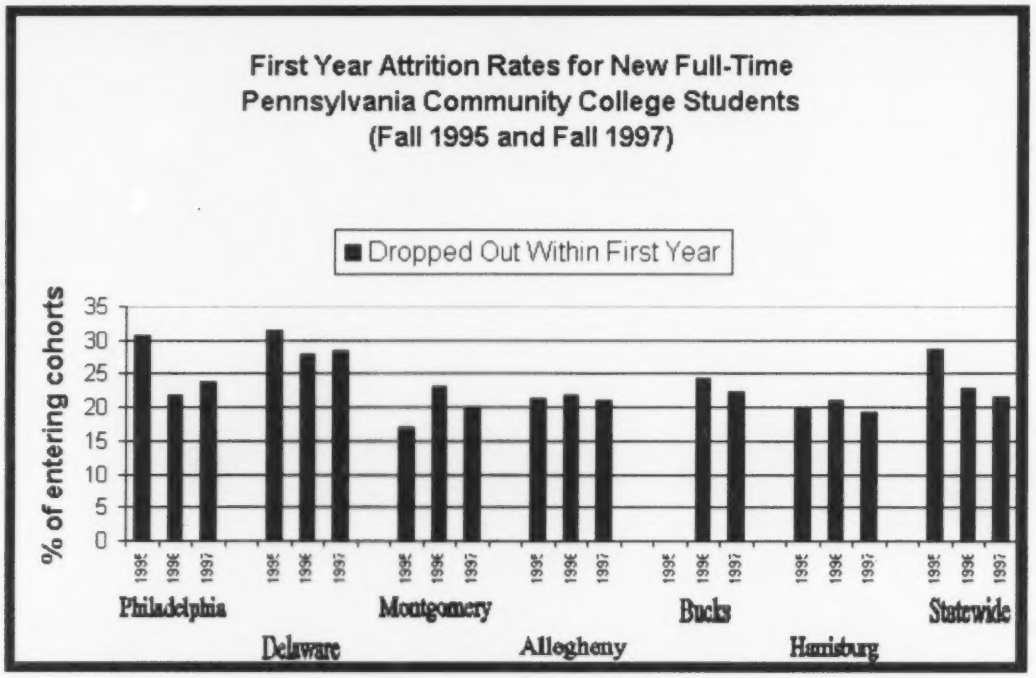


	Fall 1994	Fall 1995	Fall 1996	Fall 1997	Fall 1998
Philadelphia	12.63	12.62	12.57	12.6	12.64
Delaware	13.17	13.11	13.19	13.2	13.11
Montgomery	12.95	13	13	13.12	13.05
Allegheny	13.53	13.47	13.47	13.63	13.59
Bucks	13.02	13	12.98	12.99	12.98
Harrisburg	12.96	12.92	13.12	13.17	12.9
Statewide	12.96	13.11	13.25	13.21	13.3

Figure 5

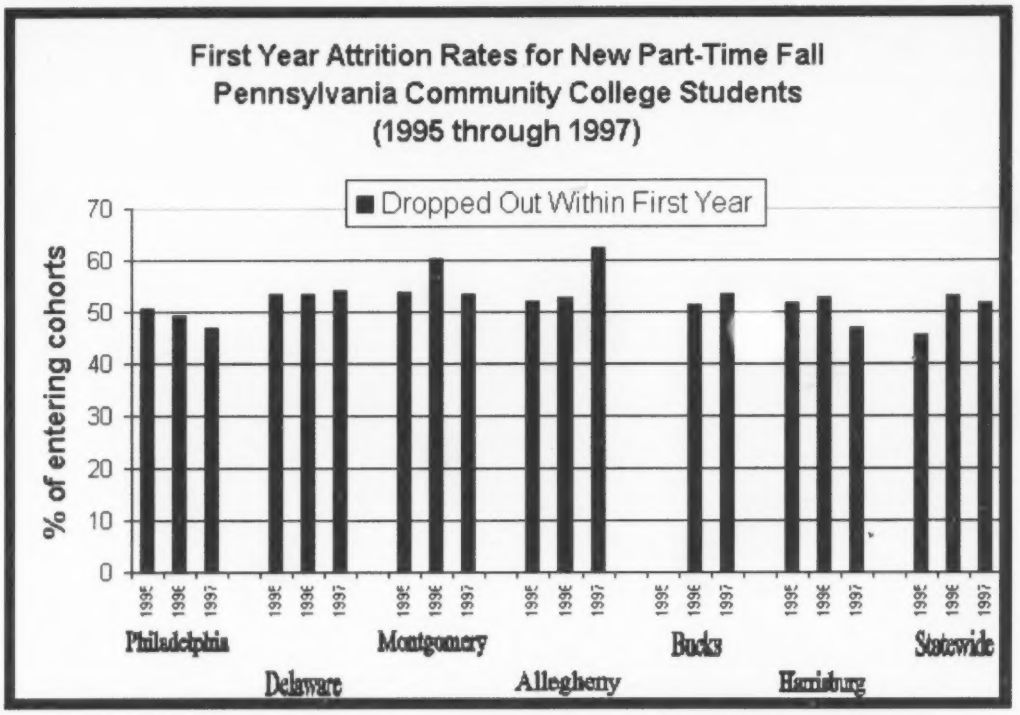
	Total Credits per Part-Time Pennsylvania Community College Students for Fall 1994 Through 1998				
	Fall 1994	Fall 1995	Fall 1996	Fall 1997	Fall 1998
Philadelphia	5.68	5.72	5.75	5.85	5.91
Delaware	5.08	5.07	5.12	5.15	5.18
Montgomery	4.95	4.98	4.81	4.79	4.8
Allegheny	5.71	5.69	5.69	5.17	5.37
Bucks	4.94	5	5.04	5.06	5.03
Harrisburg	4.67	4.76	5.14	5.21	5.22
Statewide	5.2	5.19	5.22	5.08	5.21

Figure 6



	Dropped Out Within First Year		
	1995	1996	1997
Philadelphia	30.6	21.8	23.9
Delaware	31.5	27.8	28.5
Montgomery	16.9	23.2	19.9
Allegheny	21.3	21.8	21
Bucks	unavailable	24.3	22.2
Harrisburg	19.8	21	19.2
Statewide	28.6	22.8	21.6

Figure 7



	Dropped Out Within First Year		
	1995	1996	1997
Philadelphia	50.8	49.3	46.8
Delaware	53.5	53.4	54.1
Montgomery	53.9	60.2	53.4
Allegheny	51.9	52.6	62.5
Bucks	unavailable	51.5	53.5
Harrisburg	51.7	52.7	46.8
Statewide	45.4	53.1	51.6

Figure 8

	Graduation Rates* of First-Time Full-Time Pennsylvania Community College Students (1991-1992 through 1993-1994)		
	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994

Philadelphia	14.1	11.6	9.8
Delaware	20	19.7	18.7
Montgomery	15.1	20.6	19.3
Allegheny	23.3	20.9	20.6
Bucks	16.9	15.5	14.7
Harrisburg	25.2	21.9	21.9
Statewide	22.9	20.4	19.7

*Based on graduation status five years following initial enrollment

Figure 9

	Graduation Rates* of First-Time Part-Time Pennsylvania Community College Students (1991-1992 through 1993-1994)		
	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994
Philadelphia	6	4.4	3.8
Delaware	9	6.8	6.5
Montgomery	9.5	10.1	10.3
Allegheny	9.5	10.1	10.3
Bucks	8.1	7.5	7.6
Harrisburg	8.1	7.5	7.6
Statewide	7.5	12.3	6.6

*Based on graduation status five years following initial enrollment

Figure 10

	Credit Accumulation for First-Time Full-Time Community College of Philadelphia Students (1991-1992 through 1993-1994)		
	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994
0-14 Credits	31.8	43.4	41.2
15-29 Credits	21.4	21.5	18.1
30+ Credits	32.7	23.4	30.9
Graduates	14.1	11.6	9.8

Figure 11

	Credit Accumulation for First-Time Part-Time Community College of Philadelphia Students (1991-1992 through 1993-1994)		
	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994
0-14 Credits	64.6	73.1	72.6
15-29 Credits	16.7	13.1	11.3
30+ Credits	12.7	9.3	12.3
Graduates	6	4.4	3.8

Figure 12

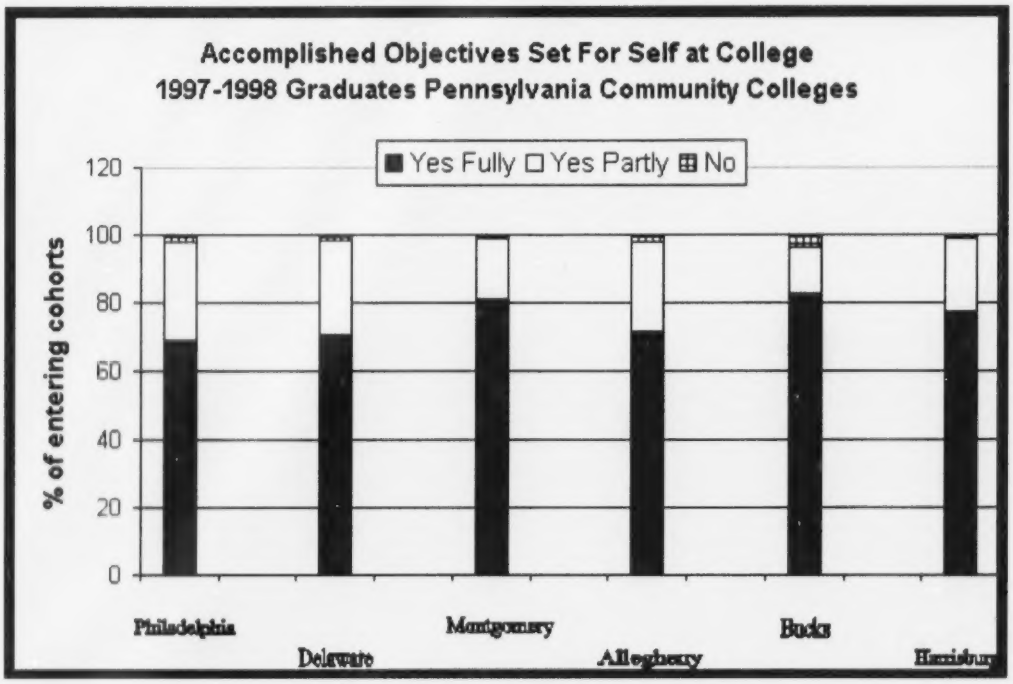
	Credit Accumulation for 1993-1994 Full-Time Pennsylvania Community College Students			
	0-14 Credits	15-29 Credits	30+ Credits	Graduates
Philadelphia	41.2	18.1	30.9	9.8

Delaware	34.4	18.7	28.2	18.7
Montgomery	28.4	19.3	33	19.3
Allegheny	24.2	24.7	30.5	20.6
Bucks	26.8	18.8	39.7	14.7
Harrisburg	27.1	21.8	29.3	21.9
Statewide	27.6	21	30.2	19.7

Figure 13

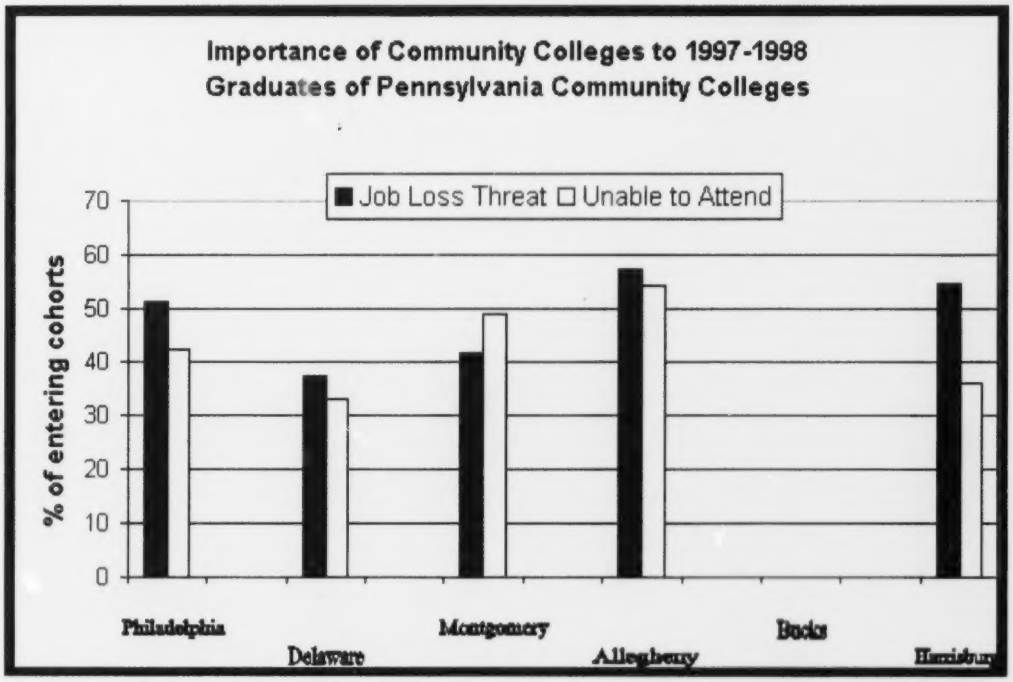
	Credit Accumulation for 1993-1994 Part-time Pennsylvania Community College Students			
	0-14 Credits	**15-29 Credits**	**30+ Credits**	**Graduates**
Philadelphia	72.6	11.3	12.3	3.8
Delaware	73.2	11.1	9.2	6.5
Montgomery	64.6	16.2	10.1	10.3
Allegheny	64.6	16.2	9	10.3
Bucks	69.8	12.5	13.6	4
Harrisburg	70.5	13.5	8.5	7.6
Statewide	69.8	12.3	10.7	6.6

Figure 14



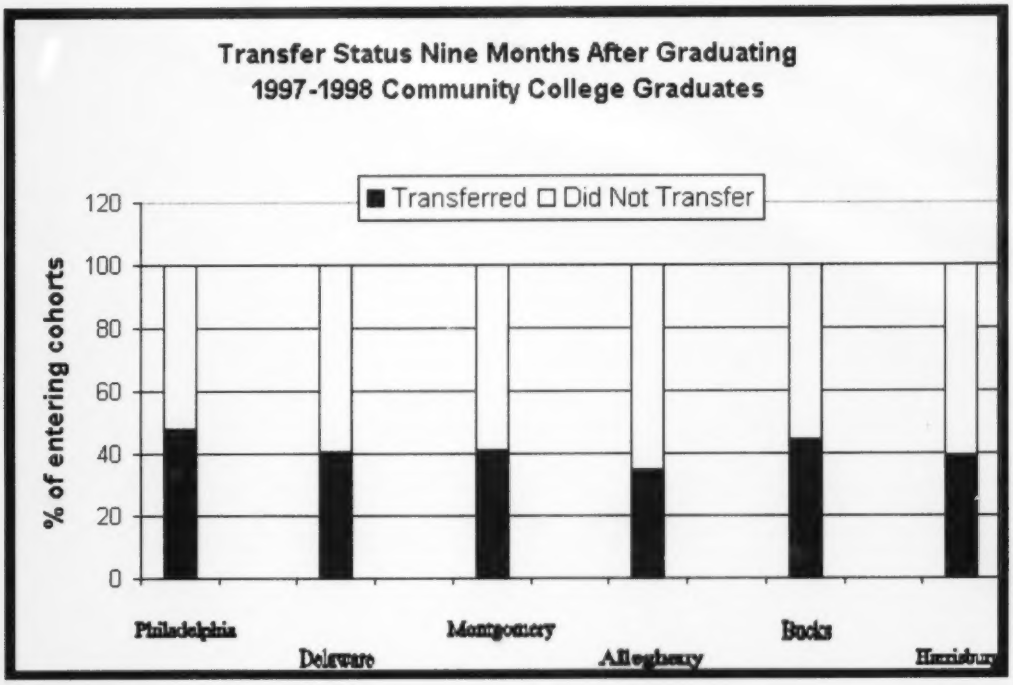
	Yes Fully	Yes Partly	No
Philadelphia	68.7	29	2.3
Delaware	70.7	27.6	1.7
Montgomery	81.2	17.7	1
Allegheny	71.7	26.4	1.8
Bucks	82.5	13.7	3.9
Harrisburg	77.5	21.3	1.1

Figure 15



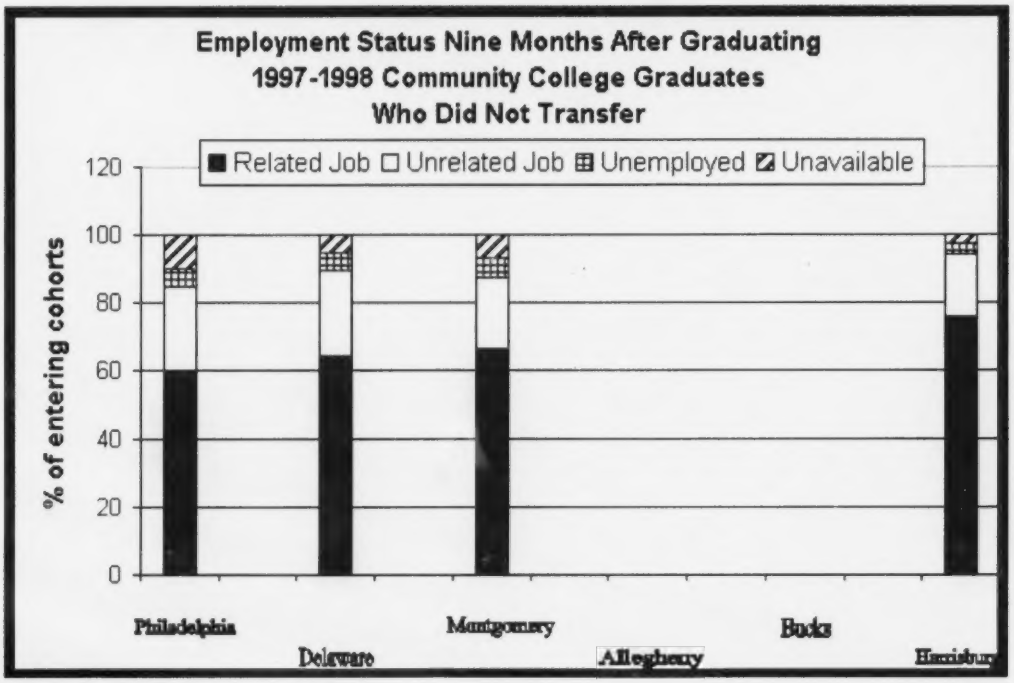
	Job Loss Threat	Unable to Attend
Philadelphia	51.2	42.2
Delaware	37.3	32.9
Montgomery	41.8	49.1
Allegheny	57.2	54.2
Bucks	unavailable	unavailable
Harrisburg	54.8	36

Figure 16



	Transferred	Did Not Transfer
Philadelphia	48.1	51.9
Delaware	40.4	59.6
Montgomery	41.3	58.7
Allegheny	34.9	65.1
Bucks	44.4	55.6
Harrisburg	39.7	60.3

Figure 17



	Related Job	Unrelated Job	Unemployed	Unavailable
Philadelphia	59.8	24.7	5.7	9.8
Delaware	64.4	25	5.3	5.3
Montgomery	66.1	21.4	5.4	7.1
Allegheny	unavailable	unavailable	unavailable	unavailable
Bucks	unavailable	unavailable	unavailable	unavailable
Harrisburg	76	18.4	2.8	2.8